

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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R 202025Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6651
INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 2192

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, PINT, BR
SUBJECT: COLONEL DISCIPLINED FOR POLITICAL STATEMENTS

REF: BRASILIA 2025

1. SUMMARY: A MARCH 4 SPEECH CALLING FOR A RETURN TO DEMOCRACY AND AN
END TO "THIS INCREDIBLE INSTITUTIONAL IMPASSE" AND SUBSEQUENT PUBLISH-

ED INTERVIEWS BY A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN COLONEL LED TO HIS ARREST AND
STIMULATED CONSIDERABLE DEBATE IN BRAZILIAN POLITICAL, PUBLIC OPINION
AND, PRESUMABLY, MILITARY CIRCLES OVER THE PAST WEEK AND A HALF.
ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, THE SPEECH BY LT. COL. TARCISIO NUNES
FERREIRA, COMMANDER, (SINCE REMOVED) OF THE 13TH ARMORED INFANTRY
BATTALION, TO THE LIONS CLUB OF PONTA GROSSA, PARANA STATE, MARKED
THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT MEDICI IN OCT,
1969, THAT AN ACTIVE DUTY ARMY OFFICER OF LESS THAN GENERAL RANK
PUBLICLY CRITICIZED NOT ONLY THE DIRECTIONS OF GOB POLICY BUT THE
PRESIDENT HIMSELF. IN HIS INTERVIEWS, FERREIRA DIRECTLY ACCUSED
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GEISEL OF ACTING IN AUTOCRATIC FASHION, AND, IN CALLING FOR OTHER,
MORE SENIOR OFFICERS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES ON POLITICAL ISSUES,
IMPLIED THAT THERE ARE RANKING LIKE-MINDED ELEMENTS WITHIN THE
BRAZILIAN ARMED FORCES. WHILE NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS CONTENTION
HAS SURFACED, PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FOR COL. FERREIRA'S VIEWS
HAVE COME FROM (ARENA) SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO, MDB PRESIDENT ULYSSES
GUIMARAES, CARDINAL ARNS (REFTEL), AND A VARIETY OF LESSER FIGURES,

INCLUDING A NUMBER OF MDB DEPUTIES WHO HAVE VOICED THEIR SUPPORT IN CONGRESS. EVEN SAO PAULO GOVERNOR PAULO EGYDIO MARTINS (ARENA) HAS HAD KIND WORDS FOR FERREIRA, CALLING HIM A MAN OF "PROFOUND INTEGRITY AND IDEALISM," ALL THIS DESPITE A WARNING BY (ARENA) SENATE MAJORITY LEADER EURICO RESENDE THAT THE FERREIRA MATTER IS SOLELY A QUESTION OF MILITARY DISCIPLINE, AND THAT COMMENT ON IT COULD ENDANGER FUTURE GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. THE PRESS, HOWEVER, HAS HANDLED THE MATTER WITH CONSIDERABLE CARE. FERREIRA, WHO HAS AN ERRATIC MILITARY RECORD, REPORTEDLY PLANS TO RETIRE FROM THE MILITARY AND RUN FOR ELECTION AS A STATE OR FEDERAL DEPUTY. END SUMMARY.

2. FERREIRA'S MARCH 4 SPEECH WAS HIS FIRST TO A LOCAL CIVIC ORGANIZATION DURING HIS TWO YEARS AS COMMANDER OF THE 13TH INFANTRY BATTALION, AN 800-MAN UNIT STATIONED 120 KILOMETERS FROM CURITIBA. HE WAS REMOVED FROM HIS COMMAND AND PLACED UNDER 48-HOUR HOUSE ARREST A FEW DAYS LATER.

3. SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO WAS THE FIRST MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURE TO EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR FERREIRA'S VIEWS, SAYING ON MARCH 10 THAT "HE (FERREIRA) SAID WHAT I HAVE BEEN PREACHING" (I.E., IN HIS "PRESIDENTIAL" CAMPAIGN). MAGALHAES SAID HE HAS KNOWN FERREIRA FOR SOME TIME, AND CLAIMED THAT HIS SPEECH FURTHER ILLUSTRATED THAT CIVILIAN DISCONTENT AND DESIRE FOR RETURN TO DEMOCRACY ARE REFLECTED WITH THE MILITARY--A STATEMENT WHICH BROUGHT TO MIND THE SENATOR'S EARLIER CLAIMS OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR HIS CANDIDACY. MAGALHAES DECLINED, CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, TO COMMENT ON THE DISCIPLINARY ASPECTS OF THE CASE, WHICH HE SAID ARE SOLELY WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF MILITARY AUTHORITIES.

4. THE NEXT DAY (MARCH 11), AN UNDATED INTERVIEW WITH FERREIRA APPEARED IN RIO'S JORNAL DO BRAZIL (PARTS OF WHICH ALSO APPEARED IN THE NEWSWEEKLY VEJA) IN WHICH THE COLONEL, BESIDES AGAIN CALLING FOR RETURN TO DEMOCRACY, WAS STRONGLY CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT GEISEL PERSONALLY AND OF THE MANNER IN WHICH HE IS CONDUCTING BRAZIL'S AFFAIRS. CHIDING GEISEL FOR "NOT CONSULTING WITH THE ARMED FORCES ON ANYTHING, EITHER IN THE AREA OF POLITICS, MILITARY MATTERS OR EVEN NATIONAL SECURITY," FERREIRA STATED THAT "THERE HAS BEEN A TOTAL DEFORMATION OF THE MOVEMENT OF 1964. WE LEFT A TOTALITARIAN PROCESS WHICH WAS ATTEMPTING (TO IMPOSE ITSELF) BY MEANS OF A GOVERNMENT OF DISORDER, AND ENTERED A TOTALITARIAN PROCESS CREATED BY A GOVERNMENT OF

EXCESSIVE ORDER." FERREIRA PRAISED MAGALHAES PINTO'S PLATFORM (RIO 1218) AND DENIED THAT OPPOSITION TO A DEMOCRATIC OPENING EXISTS WITHIN THE MILITARY. HE IMPLIED, ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT THE "ABUSE" AND "USURPATION" OF THE AUTOCRATIC SELECTION PROCESS USED BY GEISEL IN SELECTING GENERAL FIGUEIREDO AS HIS SUCESSOR HAD AROUSED SIGNIFICANT DISPLEASURE IN MILITARY CIRCLES. CLAIMING THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE BLAMED FOR ALL OF BRAZIL'S MISTAKES AND PROBLEMS, EVEN

THOUGH THEY ARE NOT CONSULTED ON ANYTHING,
FERREIRA SAID "THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE BRAZILIAN PEOPLE LEGITIMIZE
OUR (I.E., THE ARMED FORCES') ACTIONS AND OUR BEHAVIOR...MUCH IS SAID
ABOUT UNITY WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES AS THE BASIS FOR ANY SYSTEM OR
PROGRESS, BUT THIS IS AN INCORRECT APPROACH. THE ONLY UNITY WHICH
MUST NEVER FAIL TO EXIST IS THAT BETWEEN THE ARMED FORCES AND THE
PEOPLE, BECAUSE THE PEOPLE ARE THE SOURCE OF THE ARMED FORCES'
LEGITIMACY." (COMMENT: FERREIRA CAME CLOSE HERE TO CHALLENGING THE
REGIME'S CENTRAL TENET OF MILITARY UNITY. END COMMENT).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 2192

FERREIRA CALLED THE APRIL 1977 "PACKAGE" OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS
A "RETROGRESSION OF HALF A CENTURY," AND ADDED THAT HE HAD NO FAITH
IN GEISEL'S COMMITMENT TO A DEMOCRATIC OPENING. HE CALLED ON GENERAL
TO SPEAK OUT, STATING "IT IS NECESSARY THAT, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER,
MILITARY OFFICERS BREAK THEIR SILENCE," AND REMEMBERED THAT (THERE
ARE MOMENTS WHEN YOU JUSTIFY THE BREAKING OF DISCIPLINE IN THE NAME
OF LEGITIMACY," CITING THE 1964 REVOLUTION AS AN EXAMPLE.

5. AFTER COMPLETING HIS HOUSE ARREST, FERREIRA HANDED OVER HIS
COMMAND ON MARCH 13. IN DIRECT DISOBEDIENCE OF AN ORDER THAT
REPORTEDLY CAME FROM THE ARMY MINISTRY IN BRASILIA, FERREIRA ORDERED
HIS BATTALION TO ASSEMBLE SO THAT HE MIGHT BID IT GOOD-BYE. LATER
THAT DAY, THE COLONEL WAS PLACED UNDER 20 DAYS ARREST FOR HIS JORNAL
INTERVIEW.

6. MDB SENATOR EVANDRO CARREIRA MOVED QUICKLY TO HAVE FERREIRA'S

SPEECH AND INTERVIEWS ENTERED IN THE SENATE RECORDS, WHILE FEDERAL DEPUTY AND FORMER MDB CHAMBER VICE LEADER JOAQUIM BEVILACQUA DECRIED THE DISPARITY BETWEEN FERREIRA'S PUNISHMENT AND THE OCNAIF
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DISCIPLINARY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST GENERAL EUCLYDES FIGUEIREDO FILHO, THE FUTURE PRESIDENT'S YOUNGER BROTHER, WHO RECENTLY ACCUSED SOME PRIESTS WORKING WITH PRESANTS IN THE NORTH OF BEING "SUBVERSIVES" AND "TRAITORS" (SEPTEL). RESPONDING TO MDB PRAISE OF FERREIRA, SENATE MAJORITY LEADER EURICO RESENDE WARNED AGAINST POLITICAL COMMENT

ON THE MATTER, AS IT "DOES NOT FALL WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF EITHER THE LEGISLATIVE OR JUDICIAL POWERS, BUT EXCLUSIVELY WITHIN THE MILITARY AREA." RESENDE ADDED THAT CONTINUING COMMENT WOULD RESULT IN "UNCERTAINTY AND DANGER OF SHIFTING SANDS" AND THAT "THE MOMENT IN WHICH HE TRIES TO DISTURB THE DISCIPLINARY PATRIMONY OF THE ARMED FORCES, HE IS PLACING THE DEMOCRATIC REGIME ITSELF IN DANGER." ANOTHER UNNAMED ARENA LEADER -- POSSIBLY SENATOR PETRONIO PORTELLA -- WAS QUOTED AS STRESSING THE NEED TO AVOID PREJUDICING THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENDED INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES. PRESIDENTIAL AND ARMY MINISTRY SPOKESMEN, MEANWHILE, RUFUSED TO COMMENT, STRESSING THAT THIS WAS A MATTER TO BE HANDLED STRICTLY WITHIN THE MILITARY.

7. EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT FOR FERREIRA CONTINUED, HOWEVER; MAGALHAES, CARDINAL ARNS AND MDB PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES VOICED THEIRS TOGETHER ON MARCH 14 IN SAO PAULO (REFTEL). FORMER MDB CHAMBER LEADER FREITAS NOBRE CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO "REFLECT ON THE PUNISHMENT IMPOSED ON COL. FERREIRA, BECAUSE BESIDE HIS MANIFESTATION IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO A STATE OF LAW, THERE EXISTS TODAY A NATIONAL CONSCIENCE CALLING FOR THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES." EVEN SAO PAULO GOVERNOR PAULO EGYDIO MARTINS, WHILE NOT ENDORSING THE COLONEL'S IDEAS, REPORTEDLY RECALLED THAT THE TWO HAD ACTED TOGETHER DURING THE 1964 REVOLUTION AND SAID THAT FERREIRA WAS A MAN OF "PROFOUND INTEGRITY AND IDEALISM." ARENA DEPUTY NINA RIBEIRO (RIO) ALSO DEFENDED FERREIRA, SAYING THAT HE "SHOWS THAT THERE IS A DESIRE FOR DEMOCRATIC IMPORVEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE BRAZILIAN PEOPLE." PRESS COMMENT HAS THUS FAR BEEN LIMITED, ALTHOUGH O ESTADO'S CARLOS CHAGAS CLAIMED THAT SENIOR MILITARY CIRCILES IN BRASILIA WERE NOT
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DISTURBED AND REGARDED FERREIRA'S ACTION AS AN ISOLATED EVENT THAT WOULD NOT HAVE REPERCUSSIONS EITHER WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OR THE ARMED
FORCES.

8. COMMENT: FERREIRA'S MILITARY RECORD INCLUDES INVOLVEMENT IN THE

ABORTIVE ARAGARCAS REBELLION AGAINST THE KIBITSCHKE GOVERNMENT IN 1958, AFTER WHICH HE SPENT 18 MONTHS IN EXILE BEFORE BEING AMNESTIED. IN 1962, HE SPEND 30 DAYS IN PRISON AFTER DEFYING ARMY MINISTER AMAURY KRUEL AND PUBLISHING AN OPEN LETTER IN DEFENSE OF A CONTROVERSIAL GENERAL OFFICER. A BRAZILIAN ARMY SOURCE RECENTLY REMARKED TO ARMATT THAT IT WAS UNFORTUNATE FOR THE PRO-DEMOCRATIC FORCES IN THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY THAT SOMEONE AS UNSAVORY AS FERREIRA SHOULD HAVE SPOKEN OUT AS IF HE REPRESENTED THESE FORCES. (IR 6 809 0169 78, DATED 3/16/78). THE SOURCE ADDED THAT FERREIRA WILL BE ASSIGNED TO A STAFF JOB IN IV ARMY HEADQUARTERS IN RECIFE, AND THAT THE ARMY DOES NOT EXPECT THE MATTER TO PROVOKE INTERNAL DISCORD OR FURTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF SUPPORT. SOME NON-MILITARY COMMENTATORS HAVE EXPRESSED SIMILAR VIEWS, HOLDING THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM QUICKLY. OTHERS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT FERREIRA'S SPEECH AND INTERVIEW WERE MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE FOR PERSONAL PROMOTION, AND THAT THE COLONEL MAY BE PLANNING TO RETIRE AND RUN FOR ELECTION AS A FEDERAL (OR STATE) DEPUTY IN NOVEMBER. THE UNSENSATIONAL (INSIDE-PAGE) PRESS HANDLING OF THE ISSUE REFLECTS BOTH FERREIRA'S CONTROVERSIAL REPUTATION AND RECOGNITION THAT THE ISSUE IS NONETHELESS ONE THAT REQUIRES CONSIDERABLE DISCRETION. THE PRESS IS CLEARLY AWARE OF THE VERY NARROW LIMITS OF GEISEL'S TOLERANCE OF MILITARY INDISCIPLINE. POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE EQUALLY AWARE OF THE MILITARY'S ZEALOUSLY GUARDED PREROGATIVE OF DEALING WITH ITS OWN; ALMOST ALL POLITICAL COMMENTARY TO DATE HAS FOCUSED ON FERREIRA'S VIEWS AND HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO SKIRT THE DISCIPLINARY ASPECT OF THE CASE.

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